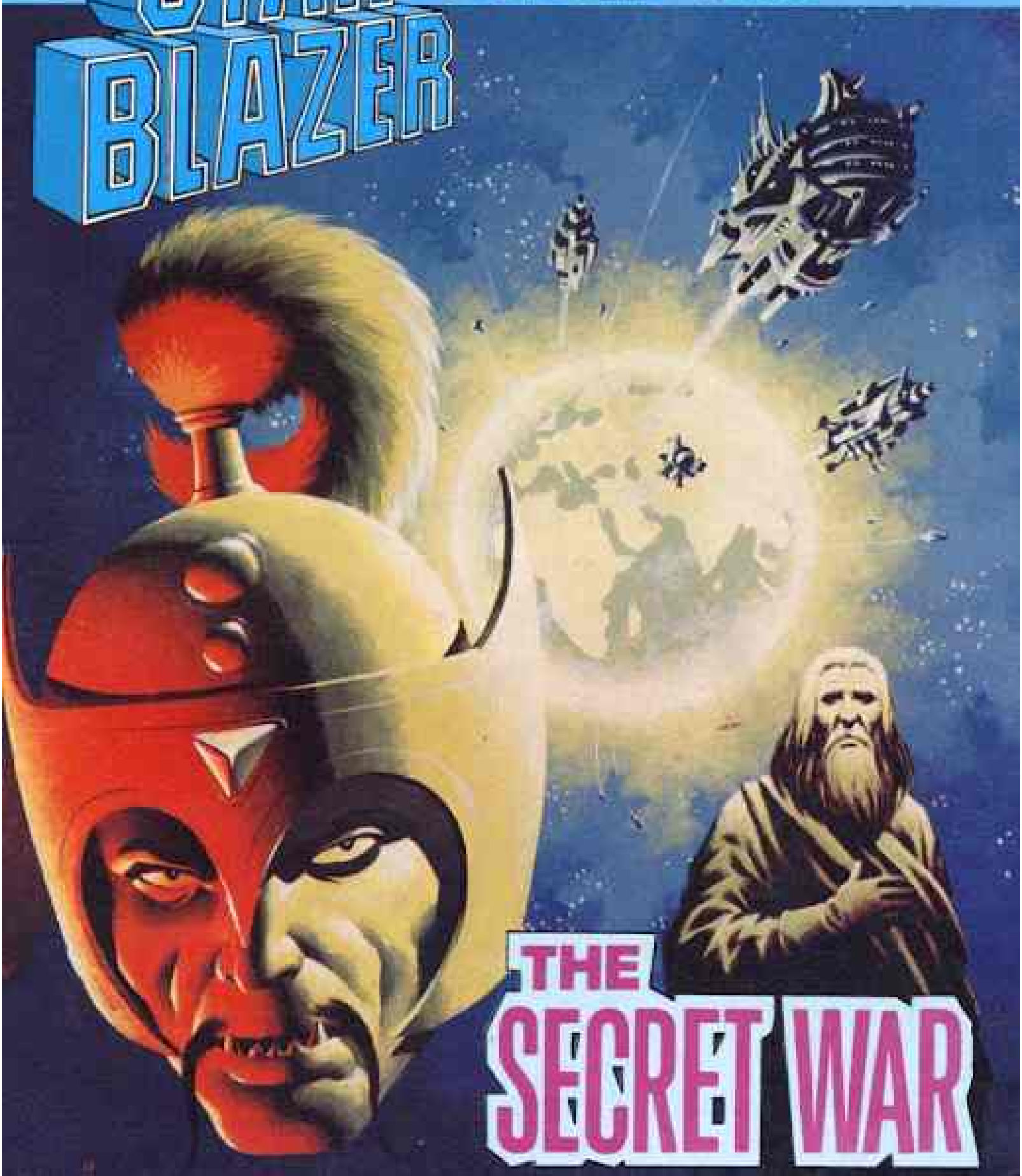
STAR BLAZER

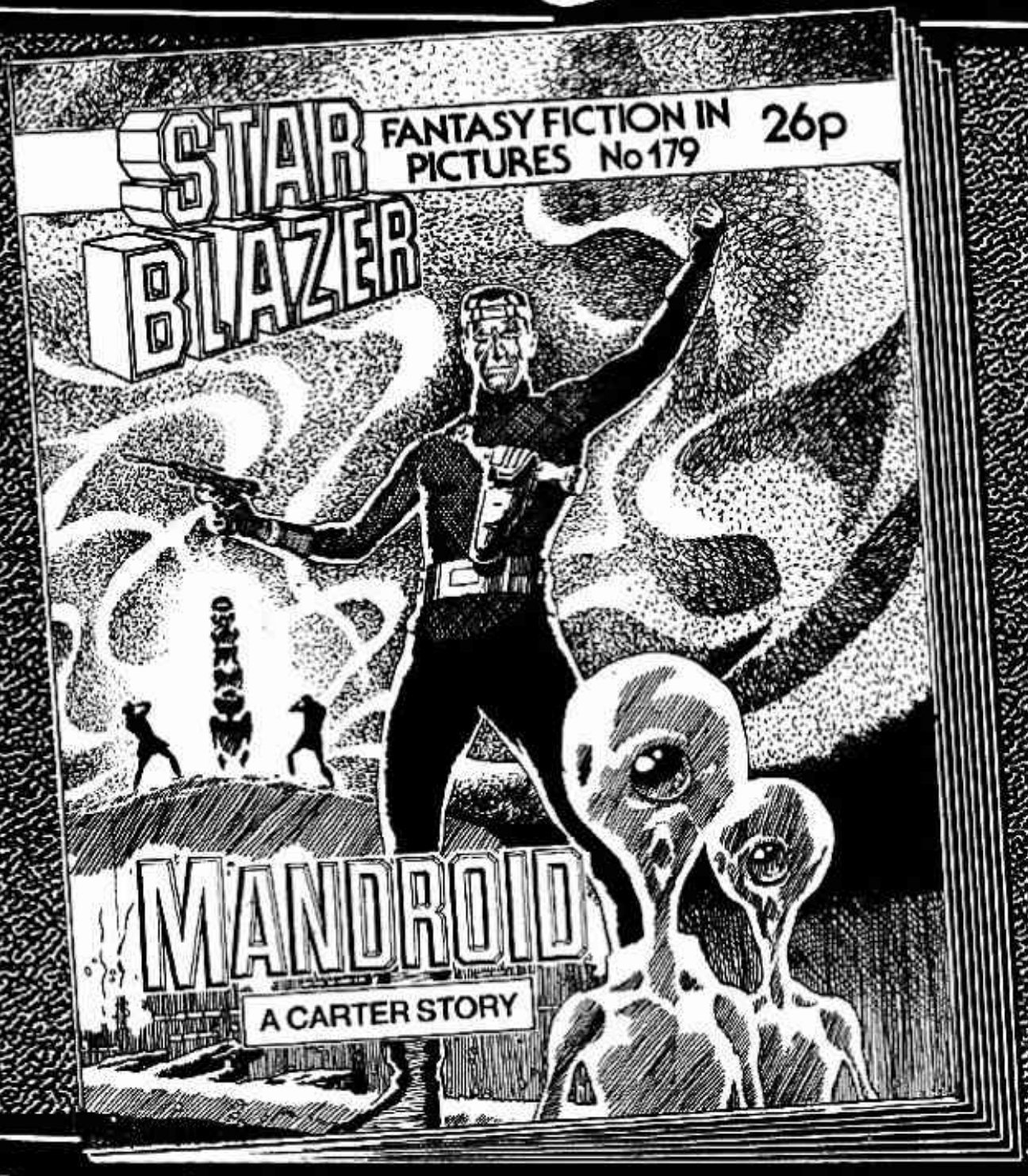
FANTASY FICTION IN PICTURES No 178

26p



THE SECRET WAR

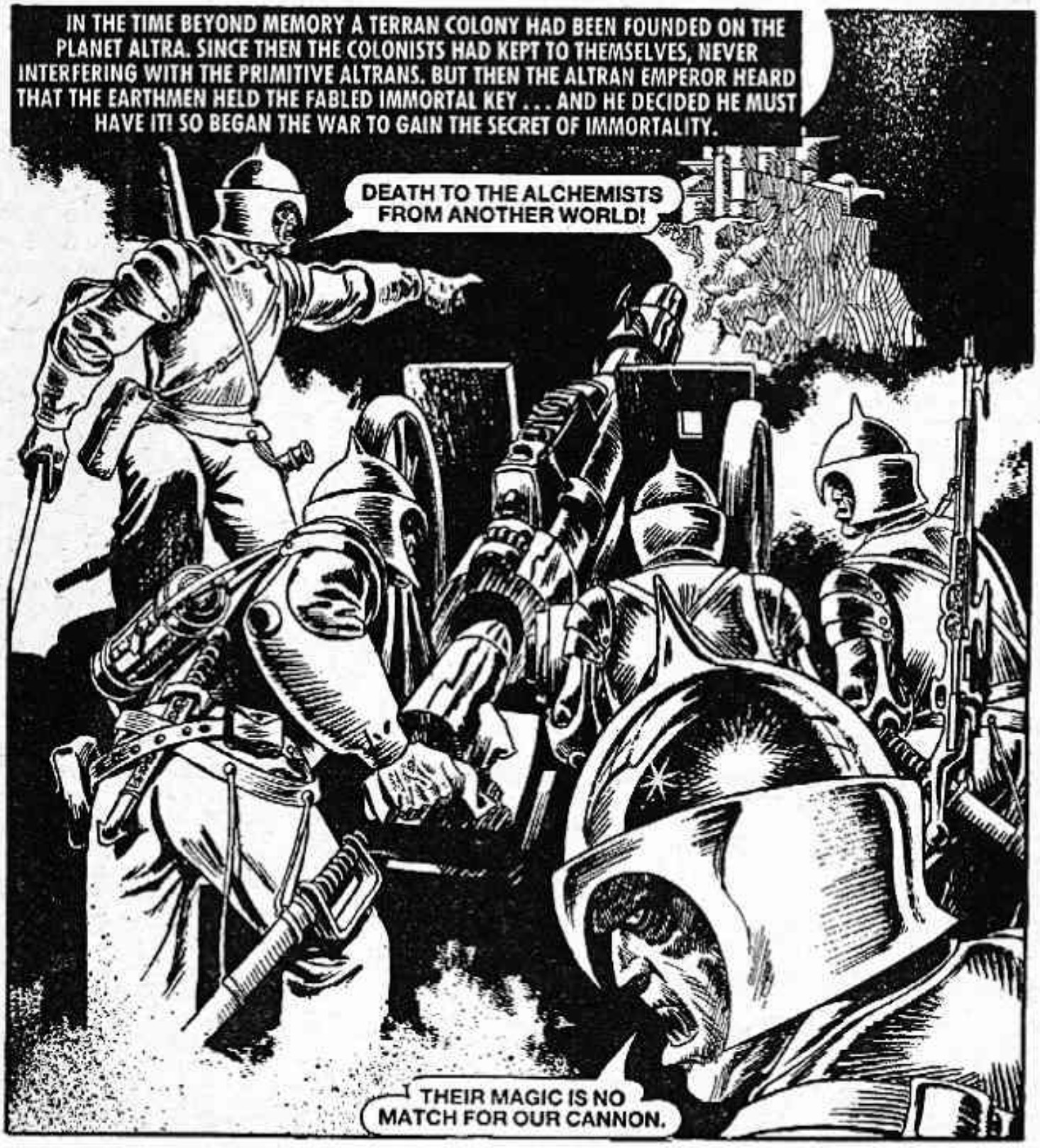
DON'T FORGET THIS MONTH'S *OTHER*



On sale at your newsagent's NOW!

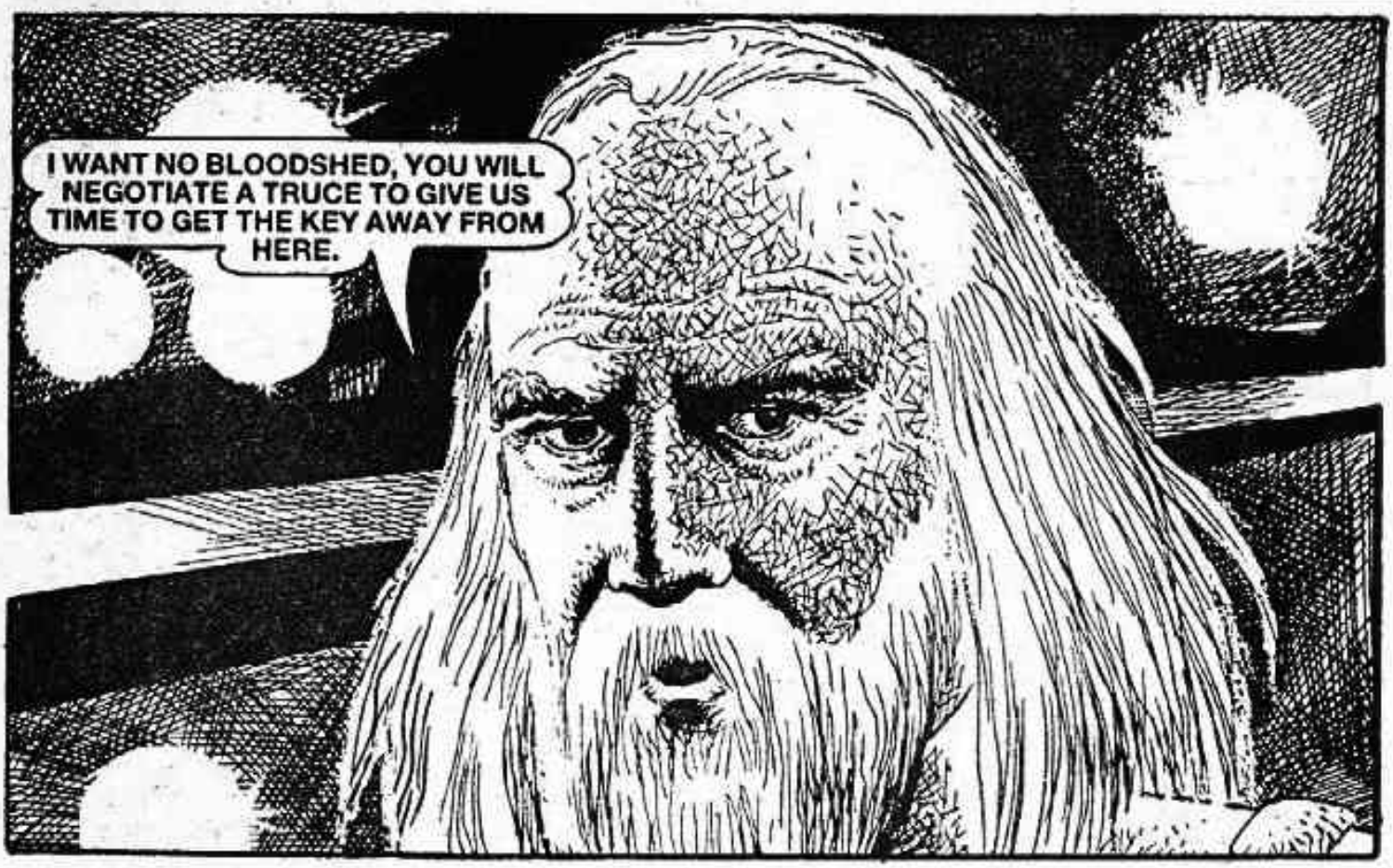
http://www.s

THE SECRET WAR



IT WAS THE EMPEROR'S NEW ADVISOR, MAGUS, WHO HAD TOLD HIM OF THE KEY.
YOUR SOLDIERS MUST TAKE CARE NOT TO DAMAGE THE IMMORTAL KEY WHICH THE EARTHMEN HOLD WITHIN THEIR FORTRESS.
MY GENERALS KNOW THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRIZE FOR WHICH WE FIGHT!
WITHIN THE TERRAN STRONGHOLD —
OUR LASER BEAMS COULD ROUT THE EMPEROR'S ARMY EASILY.
YES! BUT THIS IS THEIR PLANET. WE ARE ONLY TEMPORARILY HERE!

AS THE GRANDMASTER IT IS MY DUTY TO RETAIN A TECHNOLOGICAL BALANCE. OUR SCIENCE IS SO FAR ADVANCED OF THESE PEOPLE'S, THAT TO DISPLAY IT, WOULD CAUSE FEAR AND PANIC.


I WANT NO BLOODSHED, YOU WILL NEGOTIATE A TRUCE TO GIVE US TIME TO GET THE KEY AWAY FROM HERE.

THE GRANDMASTER SENT HIS TRUSTED LIEUTENANTS, KNIGHTON AND HOLMES, TO BARGAIN FOR THE TRUCE.
DO YOU THINK THE EMPEROR WILL AGREE TO A TRUCE, HOLMES?
I THINK HE'S SCARED ENOUGH OF THE GRANDMASTER'S "MAGIC POWERS" TO ACCEPT OUR TERMS, KNIGHTON.
KNIGHTON AND HOLMES WERE GIVEN A HEARING.
. . . SO YOUR COUNCIL ARE ON THE VERGE OF PERSUADING YOUR GRAND MASTER TO SURRENDER, TERRANS.
YES, AND MANY LIVES WILL BE SAVED IF YOU AGREE TO A SHORT TRUCE.

I THINK IT IS A TRICK TO GAIN TIME TO STRENGTHEN THEIR DEFENCES.
PERHAPS, BUT IT ALSO GIVES ME TIME TO DEPLOY MY SPECIAL WEAPON. AGREE TO THEIR TERMS.
THE EMPEROR NEVER ARGUED WITH THE DECISIONS OF HIS SECRETIVE ADVISOR.
I AGREE . . . THERE WILL BE A CEASE FIRE UNTIL THE DAWN OF THE THIRD SUN. BY WHICH TIME I HOPE TO SEE A WHITE FLAG ON YOUR TOPMOST TURRET.
WE ARE OBLIGED TO YOU, SIRE.
THE TWO LIEUTENANTS RETURNED TO THE GRANDMASTER. AT NIGHTFALL, HE DESPATCHED KNIGHTON AND HOLMES ON A PERILOUS MISSION.
THE UNIVERSAL KEY IS VITAL TO THE EARTH REGENERATION PLAN — GUARD IT WITH YOUR LIVES.

A SHIP HAS BEEN SENT TO COLLECT YOU FROM THE RENDEZVOUS POINT IN THE SHOOTING-STAR HILLS, USE THE DISK PORTER TO GET THERE.
THE DISK-PORTER WAS FITTED WITH A GRAVITY GENERATOR WHICH BENT RAYS OF LIGHT AROUND THE TRAVELLERS, MAKING THEM INVISIBLE.
IT'S AN OPEN ROAD ONCE WE'RE THROUGH THE EMPEROR'S LINES.

BUT —
HADES TEETH! WE'VE SET OFF A CONTACT MINE!

IS THE IMMORTAL KEY, OK?
YES, BUT I DON'T KNOW FOR HOW LONG!

HOLMES' FEARS WERE WELL FOUNDED. THE MINE BLAST HAD ALERTED THE EMPEROR'S MEN.
A ROUND OF INCENDIARY WILL SHOW US IF THERE'S ANYTHING OUT THERE.
FIRE!

SOME TRUCE! KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN AND THEY MIGHT NOT SEE US.
BEING SEEN IS THE LAST OF MY WORRIES!
THEY'RE LOBBING MORTARS AT US NOW, BUT I'VE GOT AN IDEA HOW TO DISTRACT THEIR FIRE.
I'M RIGHT ON TOP OF ANOTHER MINE, THE VIBRATION FROM THEIR BARRAGE COULD SET IT OFF AT ANY MOMENT.

THE DISK-PORTER TOOK ITS DEADLY CARGO TO THE HEART OF THE EMPEROR'S FORCES.
THE DRIVE UNIT OF THE DISK-PORTER IS STILL WORKING, THOUGH THE INVISIBILITY BARRIER IS NOW OUT OF COMMISSION.

. . . AND MADE CONTACT!
AIEEEEE! WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!
BOOM!
THE MINE EXPLOSION CAUSED ENOUGH CONFUSION TO COVER THE DASH BY THE EARTHMEN TO A SAFE AREA.
WE'LL TAKE A BREATHER IN THE ROCKS, THEN MAKE STRAIGHT FOR THE RENDEZVOUS WITH THE RESCUE SHIP.
LET'S HOPE THE GRANDMASTER AND THE REST GET A CHANCE TO JOIN US LATER.

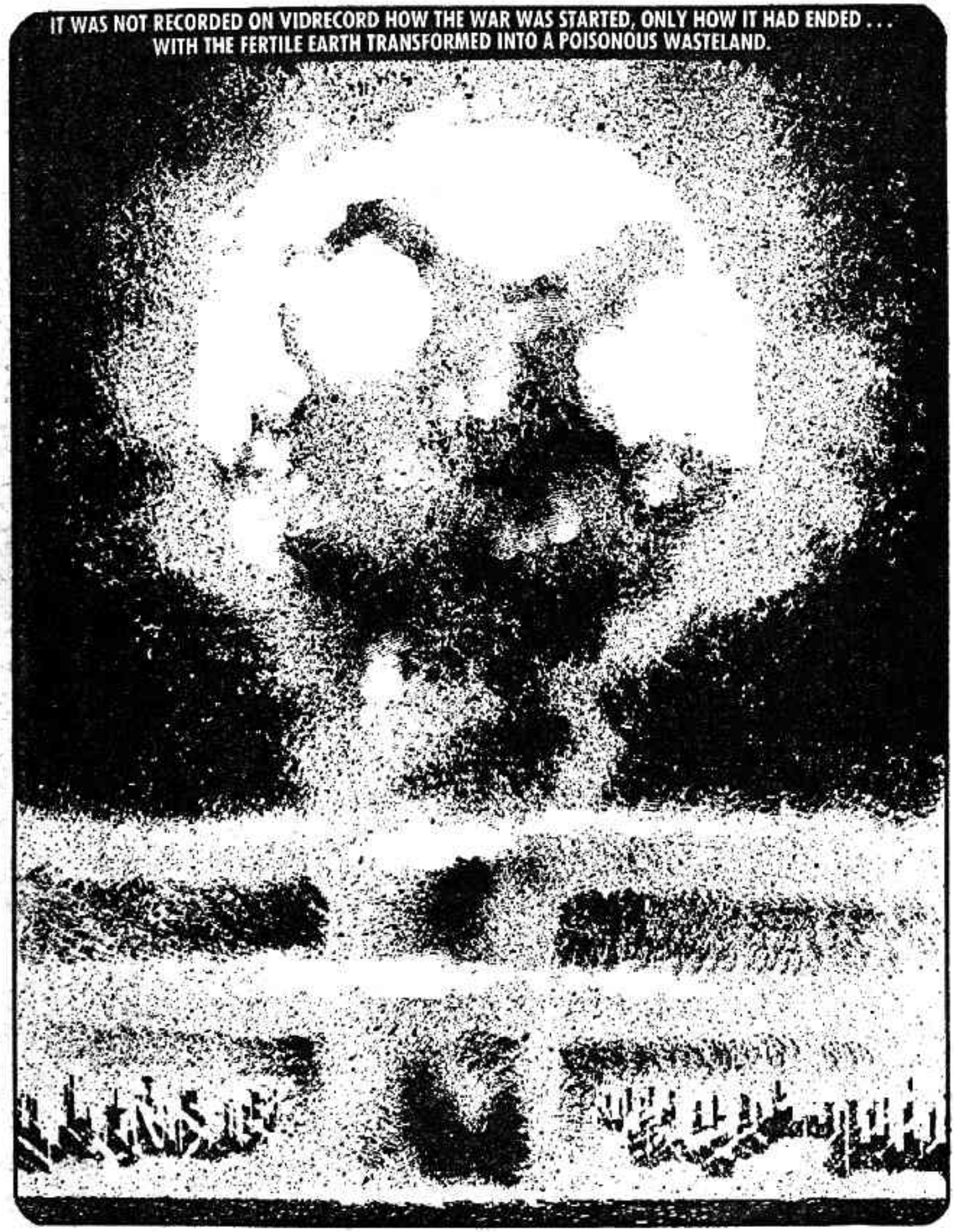
WHILE KNIGHTON AND HOLMES TOOK THE KEY TO SAFETY, THE GRANDMASTER SUPERVISED THE DESTRUCTION OF HIS HI-TECH EQUIPMENT.
NOTHING MUST FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE EMPEROR. SOME OF THIS TECHNOLOGY COULD CAUSE A DISASTROUS CHANGE IN THEIR EVOLUTION.
DOWN BELOW—
I SEE NO SIGN OF THE PROMISED SURRENDER.
NO MATTER! I HAVE PREPARED THE SPECIAL WEAPON WHICH WILL GIVE YOU INSTANT VICTORY.

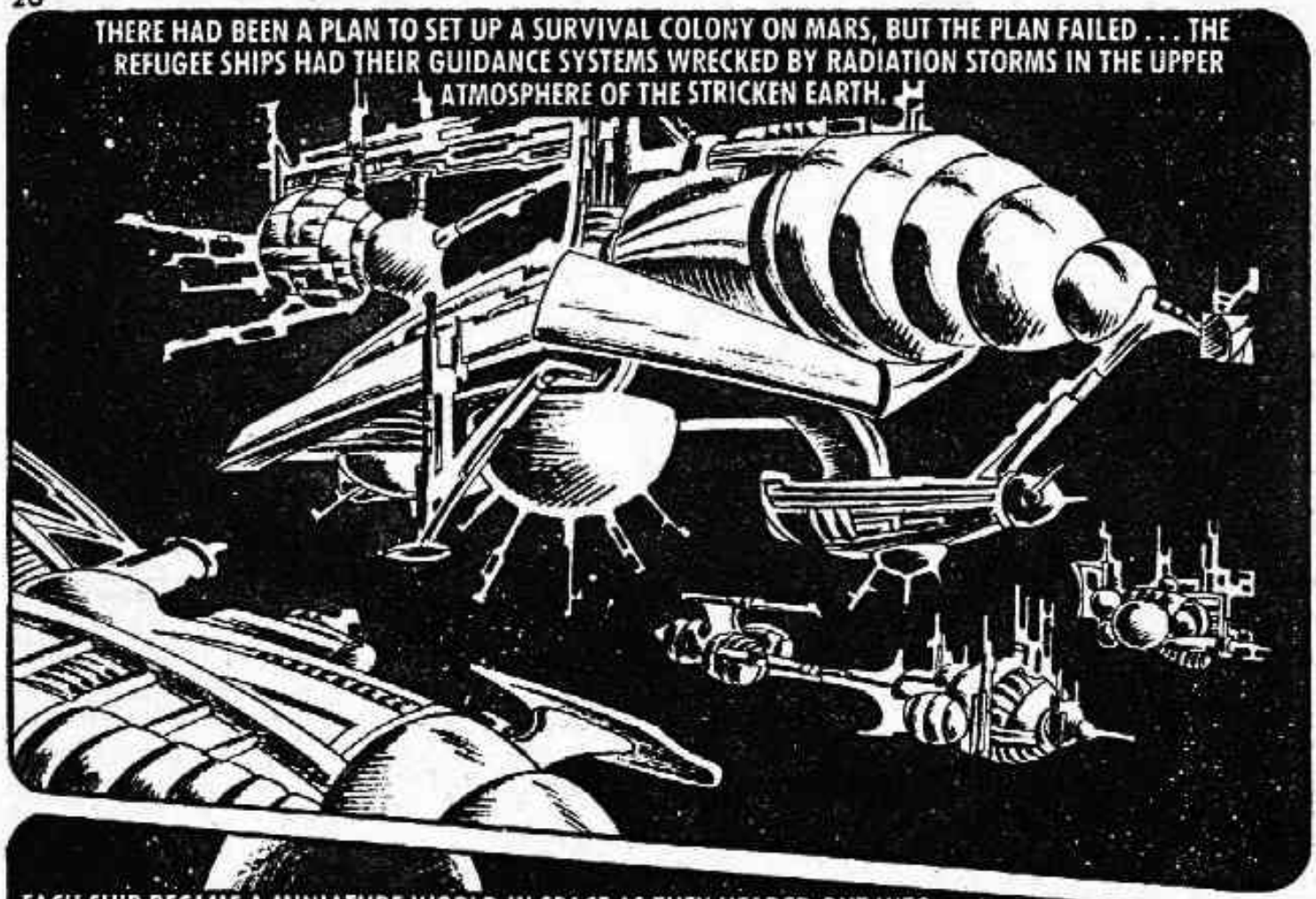
THIS IS ONE OF THE WONDERS I 'PROMISED YOU WHEN I BECAME YOUR CHIEF ADVISOR.
TO THE EMPEROR AND HIS MEN, THE GROUND-TO-GROUND MISSILE SYSTEM WAS MAGIC.
FIRE!
WHUMP!
THE MISSILE STRUCK ITS TARGET WITH DEVASTATING ACCURACY.

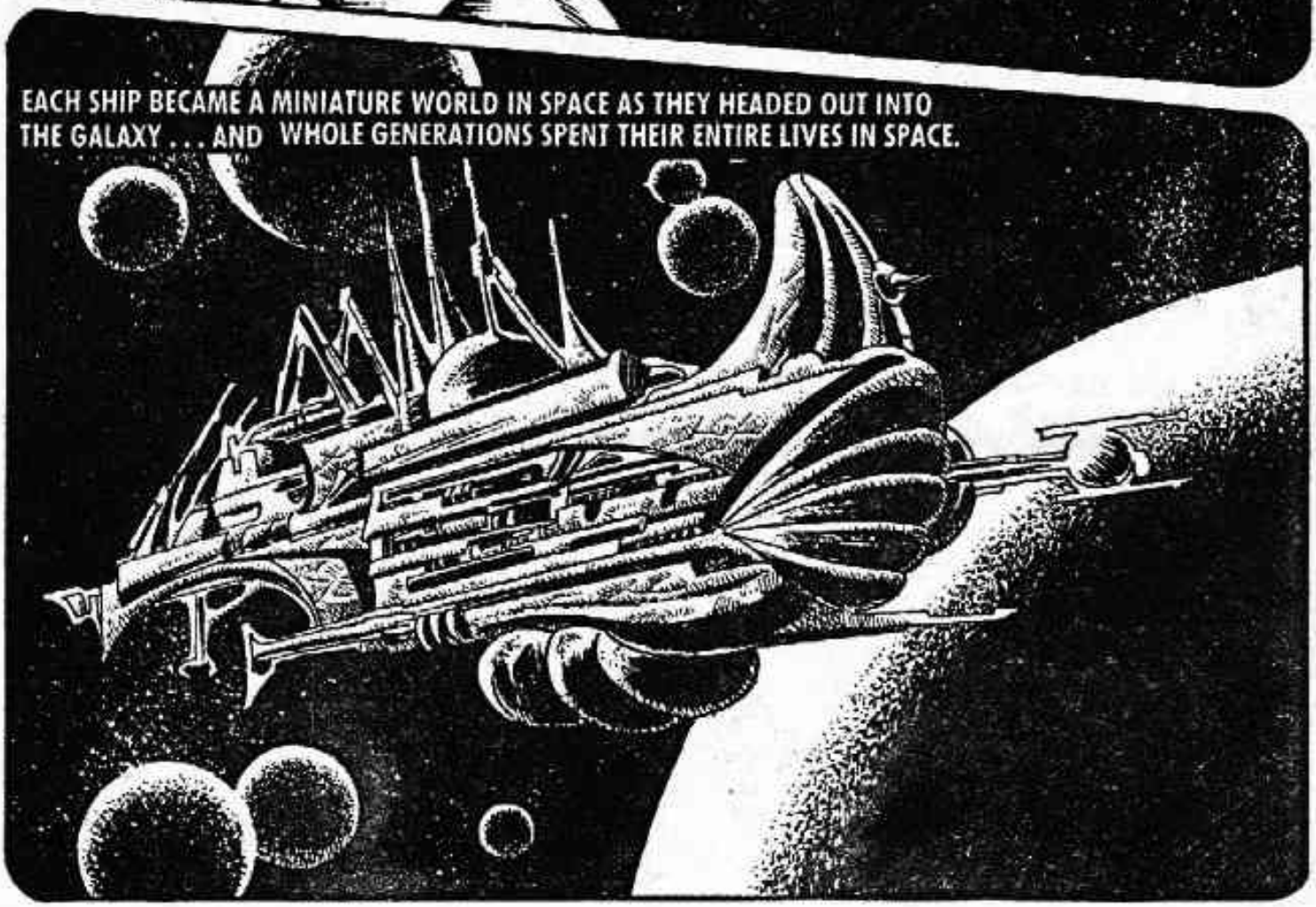
IMPOSSIBLE! THE EMPEROR IS A HUNDRED YEARS OR MORE AWAY FROM HAVING THAT SORT OF TECHNOLOGY.
THE GRANDMASTER HOISTED THE WHITE FLAG OF SURRENDER TO AVOID FURTHER BLOODSHED.
THE EMPEROR GLOATED —
YOU FOUND MY MAGIC TOO STRONG FOR YOU, EH?
IT'S CERTAINLY SURPRISED US.

BUT YOUR MAGIC INCLUDES THE SECRET OF IMMORTALITY, WHERE IS THE KEY?
I DO NOT KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN.
THE SECRET OF IMMORTALITY, YOU FOOL! THE DUNGEONS OF MY PALACE HOLD DEVICES WHICH WILL LOOSEN YOUR TONGUE, MAGICIAN!

THERE ARE SIGNS INSIDE OF HASTILY DESTROYED ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT, BUT THEY WOULD NEVER DESTROY THE KEY TO IMMORTALITY. NO MATTER, THE EARTHMAN CAN BE MADE TO OPEN HIS MIND TO ME.
LATER THAT DAY, KNIGHTON AND HOLMES CAME WITHIN SIGHT OF THE RENDEZVOUS POINT.
IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE WE'LL SOON BE HEADING BACK TO THE EARTH AFTER YEARS OF EXILE. I'VE NEVER SEEN IT EXCEPT ON VIDRECORD.

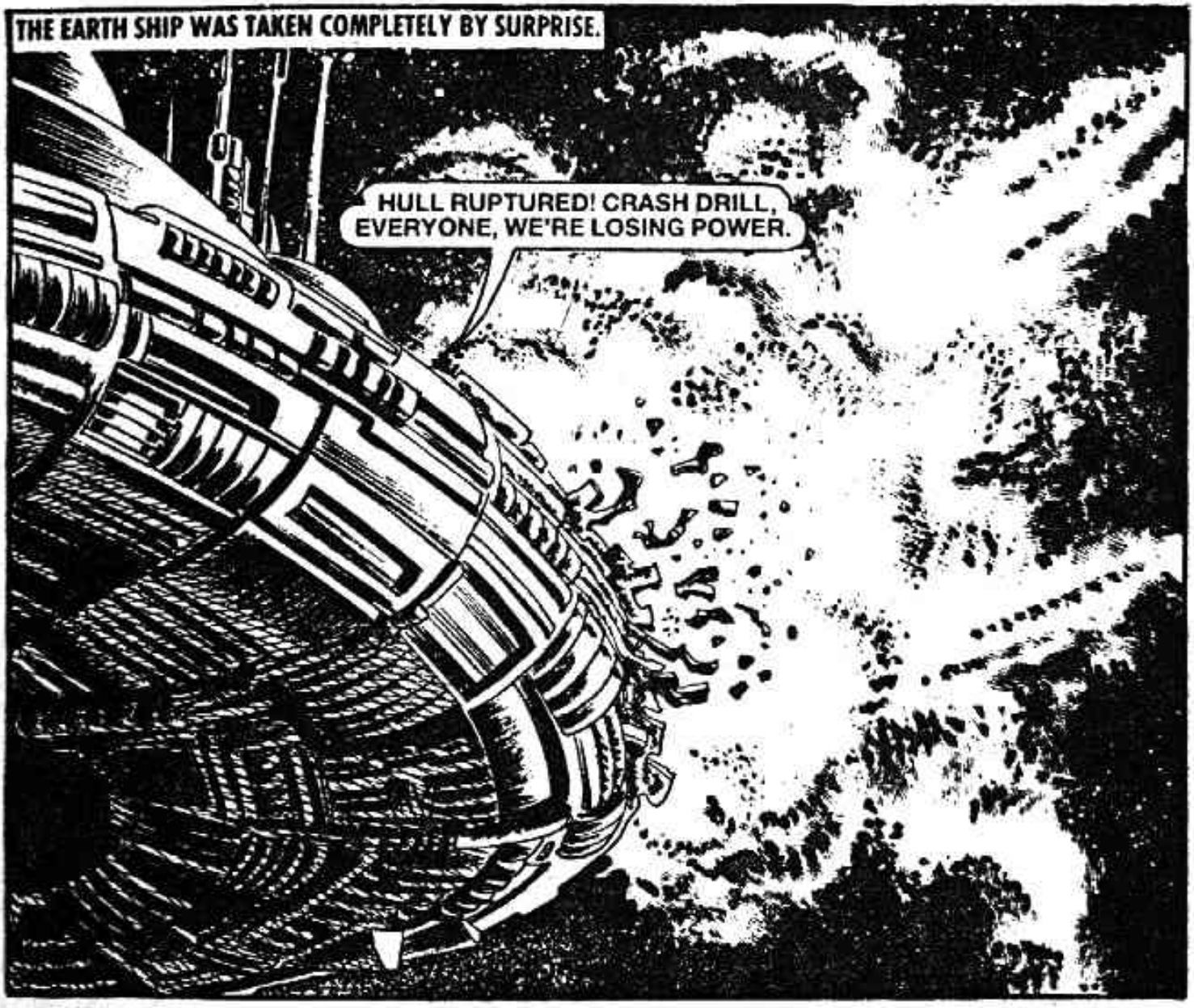

IT WAS NOT RECORDED ON VIDRECORD HOW THE WAR WAS STARTED, ONLY HOW IT HAD ENDED . . .
WITH THE FERTILE EARTH TRANSFORMED INTO A POISONOUS WASTELAND.

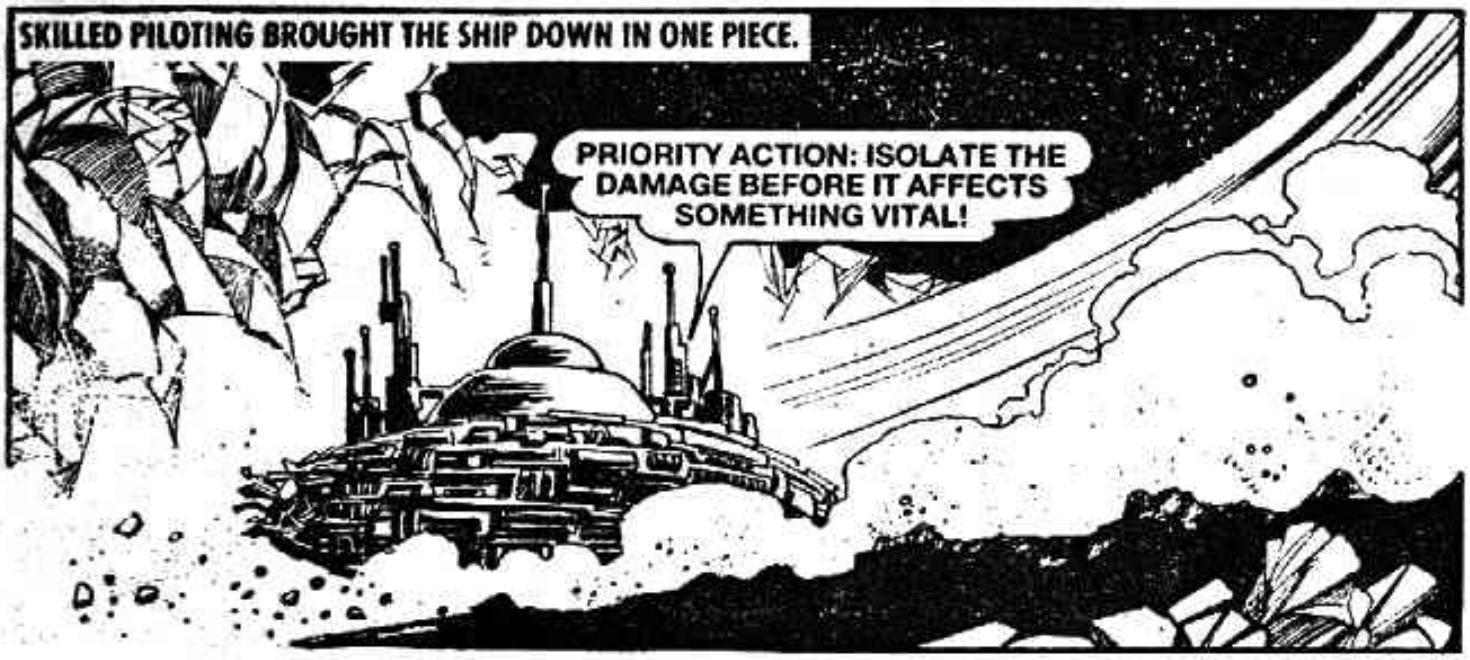

THERE HAD BEEN A PLAN TO SET UP A SURVIVAL COLONY ON MARS, BUT THE PLAN FAILED . . . THE REFUGEE SHIPS HAD THEIR GUIDANCE SYSTEMS WRECKED BY RADIATION STORMS IN THE UPPER ATMOSPHERE OF THE STRICKEN EARTH.


EACH SHIP BECAME A MINIATURE WORLD IN SPACE AS THEY HEADED OUT INTO THE GALAXY . . . AND WHOLE GENERATIONS SPENT THEIR ENTIRE LIVES IN SPACE.

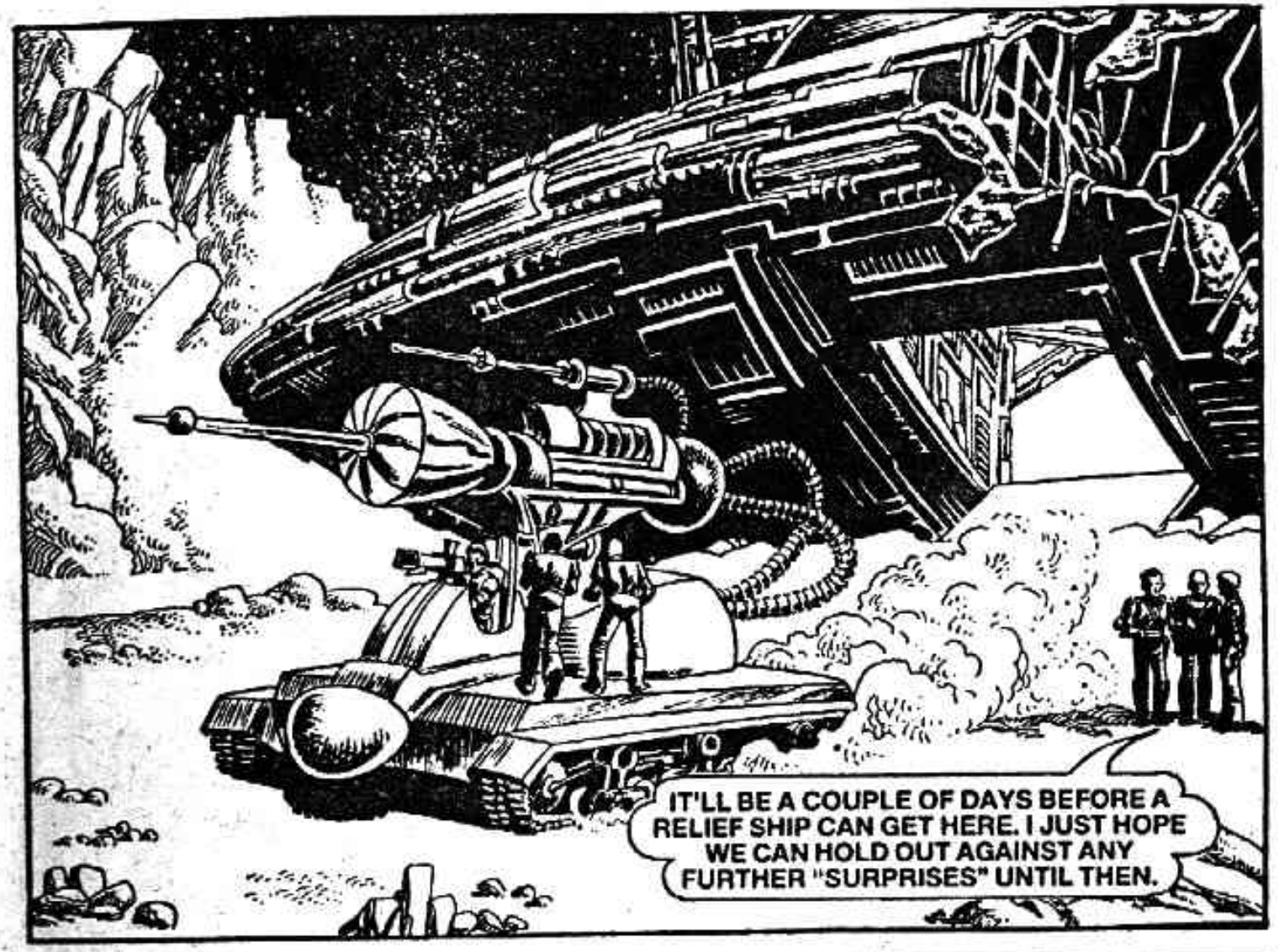
THE COLONY SHIPS TRIED TO TAKE REFUGE ON INHABITABLE ALIEN PLANETS . . . MANY FAILED . . .
. . . OTHERS SUCCEEDED, AND FOUNDED COLONIES WHICH GREW AND DEVELOPED.

THE DREAM OF A RETURN TO OLD EARTH WAS NEVER LOST. THE SURVIVORS MADE CONTACT WITH EACH OTHER AND BEGAN WORKING ON A PLAN TO REGENERATE THE POISONED HOMEWORLD.. EACH COLONY WORKED INDIVIDUALLY ON ITS OWN PART OF THE PLAN. IT WAS ON THE PLANET ALTRA THAT THE IMMORTAL KEY WAS MADE.
KNIGHTON AND HOLMES REACHED THE RENDEZVOUS.
NOW AT LONG LAST THE PLAN IS READY TO BE EXECUTED.
AND THERE'S THE SHIP WHICH WILL TAKE OUR VITAL PART OF THE JIGSAW TO THE ASSEMBLY POINT.
I DON'T BELIEVE IT! WE'RE UNDER MISSILE ATTACK!


THE EARTH SHIP WAS TAKEN COMPLETELY BY SURPRISE.
HULL RUPTURED! CRASH DRILL, EVERYONE, WE'RE LOSING POWER.


SKILLED PILOTING BROUGHT THE SHIP DOWN IN ONE PIECE.
PRIORITY ACTION: ISOLATE THE DAMAGE BEFORE IT AFFECTS SOMETHING VITAL!

THEY SEEM TO HAVE THE FIRES ISOLATED.
YES, BUT I DON'T SEE US GETTING OFF THIS PLANET IN THAT SHIP.
A HASTY CONFERENCE CONFIRMED THAT DAMAGE WAS SEVERE—
I THOUGHT THIS PLANET HAD NO MISSILES.
THAT MISSILE WAS JUST AS MUCH A SURPRISE TO US AS IT WAS TO YOU!


IT'LL BE A COUPLE OF DAYS BEFORE A RELIEF SHIP CAN GET HERE. I JUST HOPE WE CAN HOLD OUT AGAINST ANY FURTHER "SURPRISES" UNTIL THEN.

THE NEXT SURPRISE WASN'T LONG IN COMING—
CALL THE CAPTAIN. I'M PICKING UP A SIGNAL FROM THE GRANDMASTER OF OUR COLONY HERE.

THE GRANDMASTER HAD SMUGGLED A MICRO-TRANSMIT UNIT INTO CAPTIVITY, AND FROM A DARK CELL—
YOU ARE IN GREAT DANGER,CAPTAIN! THE EMPEROR KNOWS THAT YOU HAVE THE KEY.
THE EMPEROR'S CRUDE TORTURES COULD NOT HAVE WRUNG OUR MOST PRECIOUS SECRET FROM MY LIPS, BUT . . .

. . . THE HOODED ONE SUBJECTED ME TO AN ELECTRO-MIND-PROBE AGAINST WHICH I HAD NO DEFENCE.

THE AGONISED VOICE GASPED ON—
WE'VE GOT TO TRY AND RESCUE THE GRANDMASTER!
. . . I MUST END TRANSMISSION, GUARDS ARE COMING.
WITH THE UNIVERSAL KEY HELD SAFELY IN THE SHIP, KNIGHTON AND HOLMES WERE FREE TO RETURN TO THE IMPERIAL CITADEL. THEY USED JUMP-PAKS . . .
WE'VE GOT UNTIL THE RELIEF SHIP ARRIVES TO TRY AND FREE THE PRISONERS FROM THE EMPEROR'S DUNGEONS.

KNIGHTON AND HOLMES PACED THEIR JOURNEY SO AS TO ARRIVE AT THE IMPERIAL CITADEL AT NIGHTFALL.

THE JUMP-PAKS WILL GET US OVER THE CITADEL WALL WITH NO PROBLEM.

YES, BUT THERE ARE PLENTY MORE PROBLEMS WAITING INSIDE THE CITADEL!

THEY LANDED SILENTLY IN A BACK STREET—

THERE SEEMS TO BE A LOT OF ACTIVITY IN THE CITY TONIGHT. I HOPE THESE DISGUISES WILL BE ENOUGH TO AVOID DETECTION.

THE TERRANS MOVED UNSEEN AS THE EMPEROR'S FEVERISH PREPARATIONS FOR A MILITARY EXPEDITION CONTINUED.

OUR EMPEROR'S BEEN FOREVER AT WAR SINCE HE TOOK UP WITH THAT ADVISOR.

YES! WONDER WHO IT'S AGAINST THIS TIME?

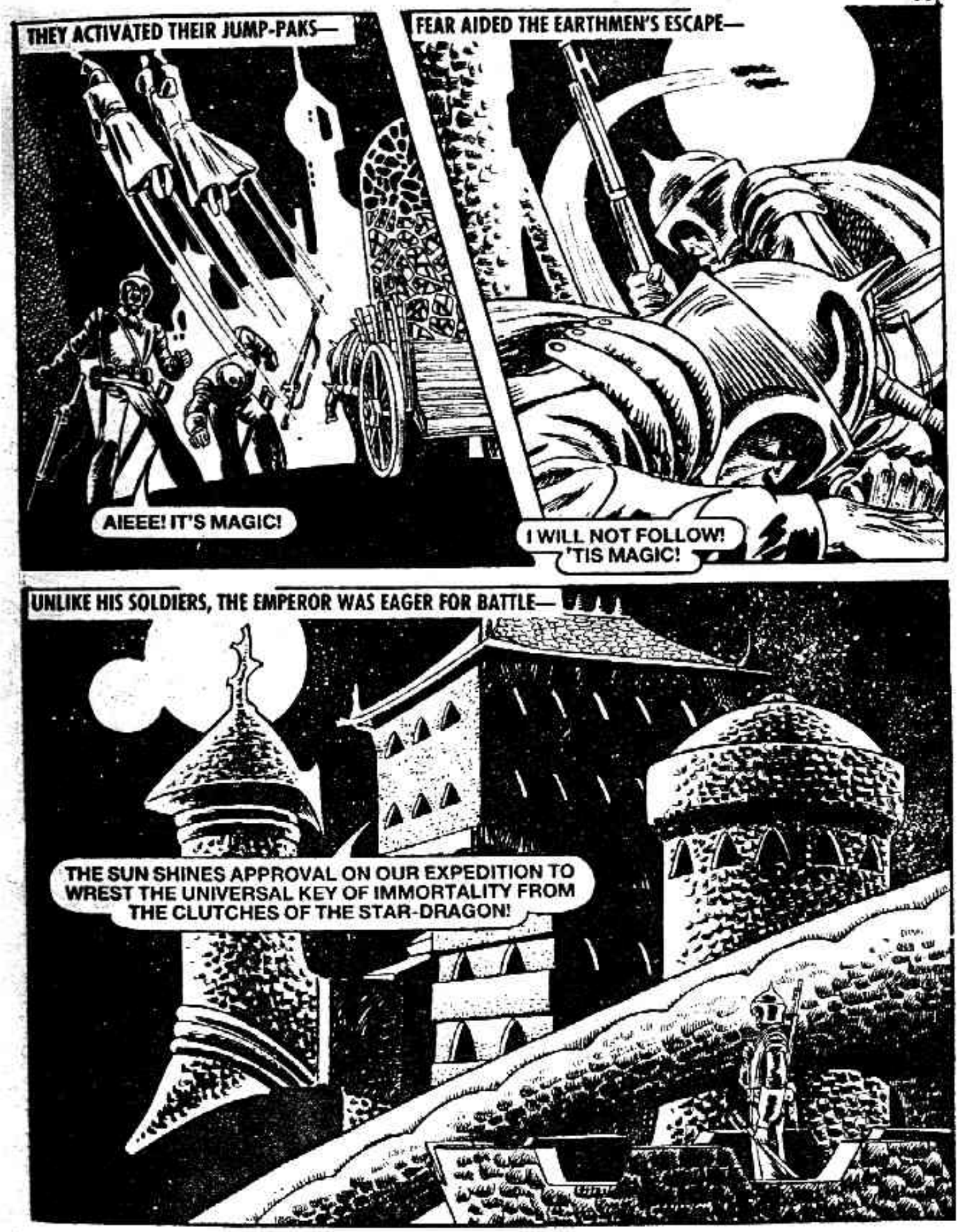
KNIGHTON AND HOLMES FOUND THEIR WAY TO THE DUNGEONS AND MADE CONTACT WITH THE PRISONERS.
WE CAME TO RESCUE YOU, BUT THE CITY IS TOO FULL OF SOLDIERS TO TRY ANYTHING TONIGHT.

WE CANNOT FREE YOU FROM HERE, BUT WE BELIEVE THAT YOU WILL BE TRANSPORTED TOMORROW . . . WE SHALL INSERT A TELEPORT DEVICE IN THE PRISON WAGON.
YOU MUST WARN THE CAPTAIN THAT THE EMPEROR LEADS HIS ARMY OUT AT DAWN TO ATTACK THE SHIP AND SEIZE THE KEY.

AND BEWARE OF MAGUS. HE IS NOT ALL HE SEEMS TO BE. I BELIEVE HE WANTS THE KEY FOR HIMSELF.

THERE'S THE PRISON WAGON. LET'S GET TO WORK.

HURRY UP, I CAN HEAR A PATROL APPROACHING.
HALT, WHO GOES THERE?


THEY ACTIVATED THEIR JUMP-PAKS—
AIEEE! IT'S MAGIC!
FEAR AIDED THE EARTHMEN'S ESCAPE—
I WILL NOT FOLLOW! 'TIS MAGIC!
UNLIKE HIS SOLDIERS, THE EMPEROR WAS EAGER FOR BATTLE—
THE SUN SHINES APPROVAL ON OUR EXPEDITION TO WREST THE UNIVERSAL KEY OF IMMORTALITY FROM THE CLUTCHES OF THE STAR-DRAGON!

I FEAR NOTHING WITH YOUR MAGIC TO PROTECT ME.

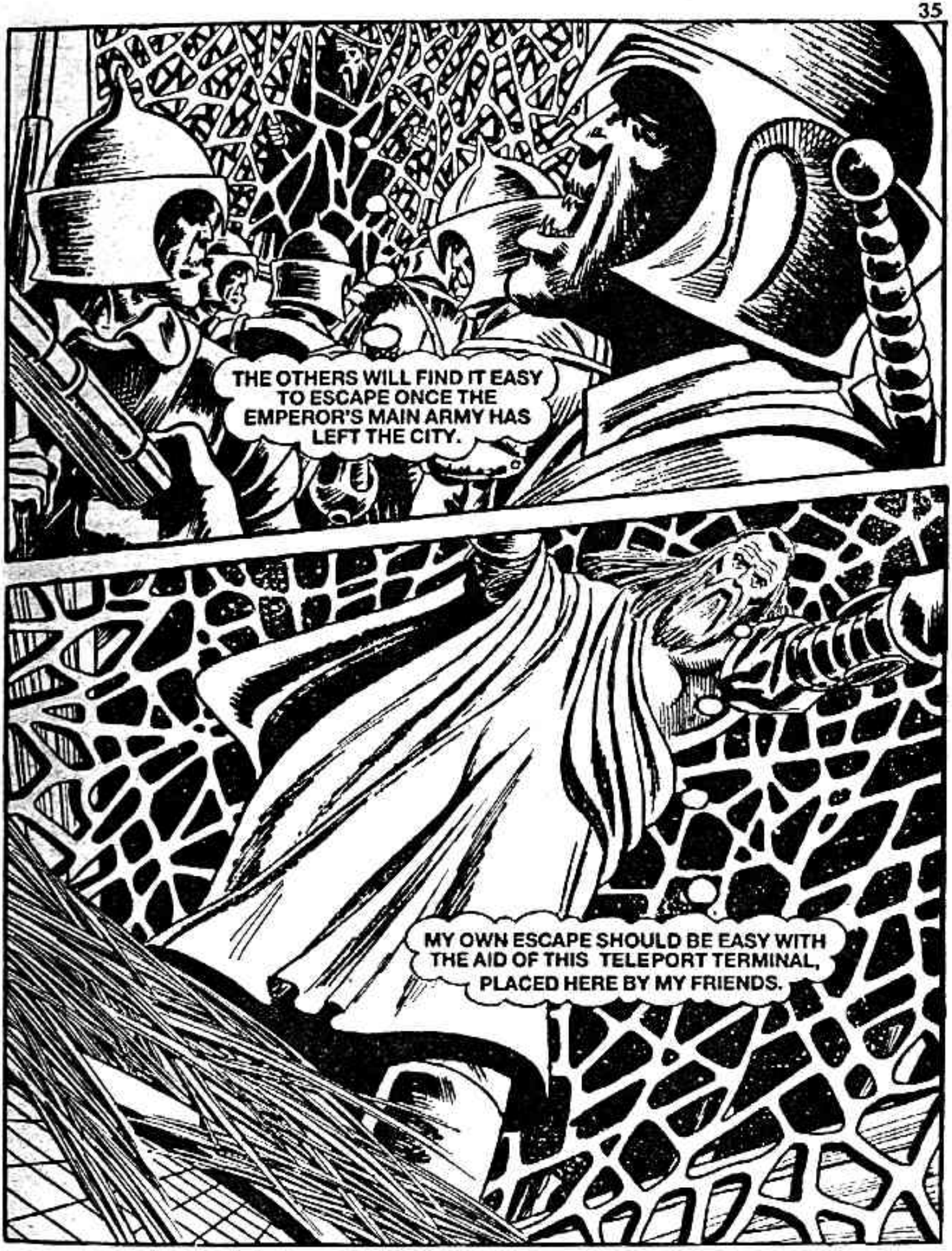
YOU WILL NEVER FAIL PROVIDED THAT YOU FOLLOW MY ADVICE. THAT IS THE PROMISE I MADE WHEN I FIRST TOLD YOU OF THE TERRANS' SECRET — THE KEY TO IMMORTALITY.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE EMPEROR'S EXPEDITION WERE IN MOTION THROUGHOUT THE IMPERIAL CITADEL. THE GRANDMASTER WAS DRAGGED FROM HIS CELL.

WE ONLY WANT YOUR LEADER. THE REST OF YOU CAN STAY HERE UNTIL YOU ROT.

THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK.

WHATEVER HAPPENS TO ME, THE REST OF YOU MUST CARRY ON AS PLANNED.


THE OTHERS WILL FIND IT EASY TO ESCAPE ONCE THE EMPEROR'S MAIN ARMY HAS LEFT THE CITY.
MY OWN ESCAPE SHOULD BE EASY WITH THE AID OF THIS TELEPORT TERMINAL, PLACED HERE BY MY FRIENDS.

GOOD MORROW, TERRAN. I PROMISE YOU THIS DAY WILL SEE ME WIN THE KEY TO IMMORTALITY AND YOUR EXECUTION.
MAYBE SO . . . BUT YOUR ADVISOR, THE MAGUS, WILL NOT LET YOU LIVE TO ENJOY IT.
STRIKE DRUMS, BLOW TRUMPETS! LET THE NOISE OF WAR DROWN THIS OLD MAN'S VOICE AS WE ADVANCE TO DESTROY THE STAR-DRAGON!

AMONG THE EMPEROR'S EXPEDITION WAS A WAGON WHOSE TRUE CARGO WAS KNOWN ONLY TO HIS ADVISOR.
FOOLS! THEY FIGHT MY BATTLES. SOON I WILL HAVE NO FURTHER NEED OF THEM.
WHEN THE SUNS REACHED NOON HIGHPOINT, THE EMPEROR'S ARMY WERE IN THE FOOTHILLS OF THE MOUNTAIN RANGE WHERE THE EARTH-SHIP LAY DAMAGED AND HELPLESS.
MY BOOTS ARE KILLING ME.
HOPE THAT THEY DO . . . THIS STAR-DRAGON WILL EAT US ALIVE.

TWO UNIX AWAY . . .

WE CHOSE THE RIGHT POINT FOR OUR AMBUSH.

ALERT THE RELIEF SHIP THAT IT'LL SOON BE TIME TO SPRING THE TRAP.

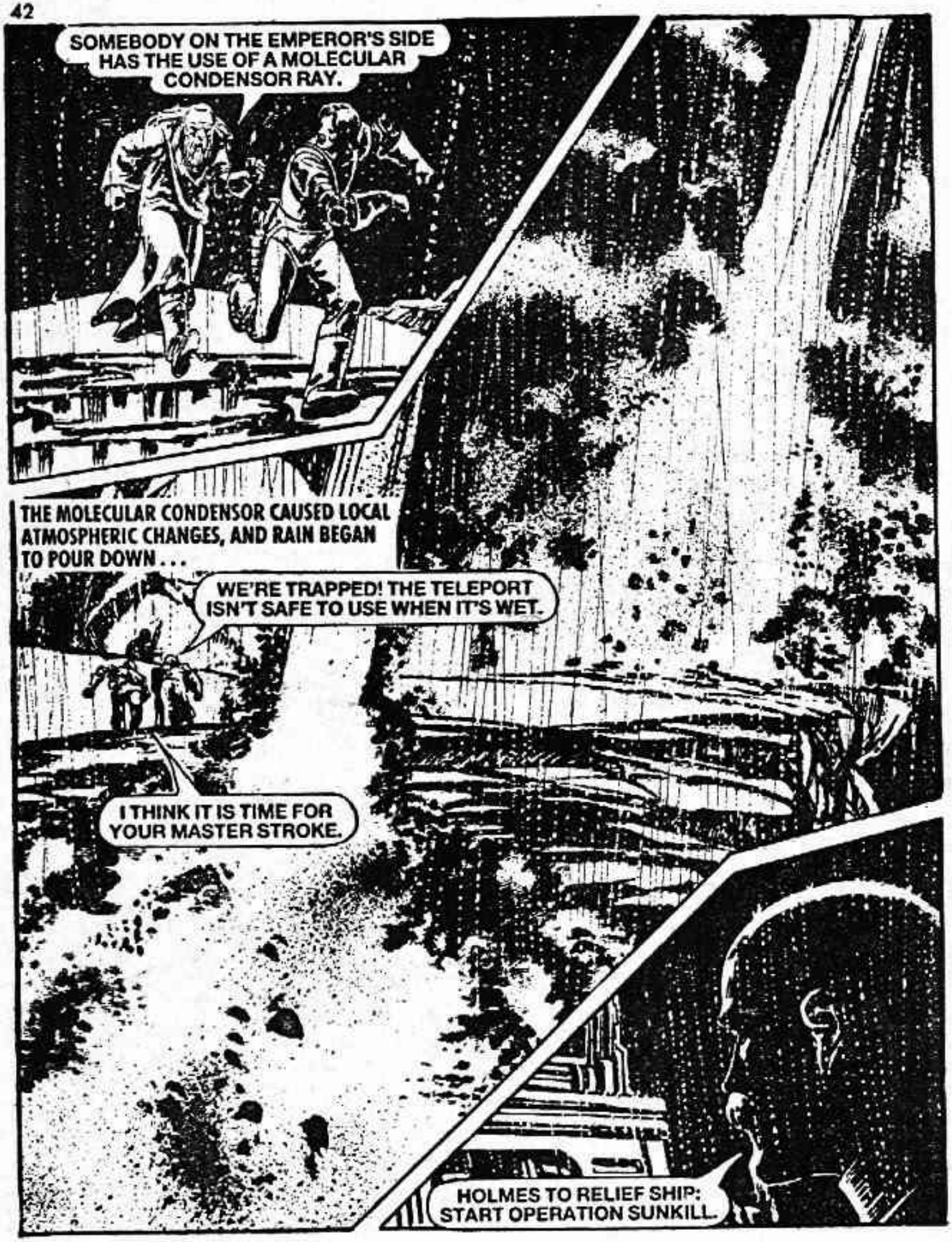
KNIGHTON AND HOLMES HAD PREPARED ELABORATE DEVICES TO FRIGHTEN THE EMPEROR'S SUPERSTITIOUS ARMY AWAY FROM THE MOUNTAINS, UNTIL THE RELIEF SHIP COULD GET THE EARTHMEN AND THE KEY TO SAFETY.

RELIEF SHIP CALLING HOLMES: CHECK, WE'RE READY WITH THE FIREWORKS WHENEVER YOU GIVE THE WORD.

GO BACK TO YOUR CITY, OR WE WILL UNLEASH OUR POWERS AGAINST YOU.
HOLMES ACTIVATED THE TELEPORT LINK WITH THE CAGE.
WHAT PRISONER, EMPEROR?
IF YOU ATTACK ME, MY PRISONER DIES INSTANTLY!
THE GRANDMASTER WAS TELEPORTED THE SHORT DISTANCE TO THE ROCK SHELF.
THAT IS BUT A SMALL SAMPLE OF OUR MAGIC. TURN BACK NOW OR SUFFER ITS FULL FORCE.

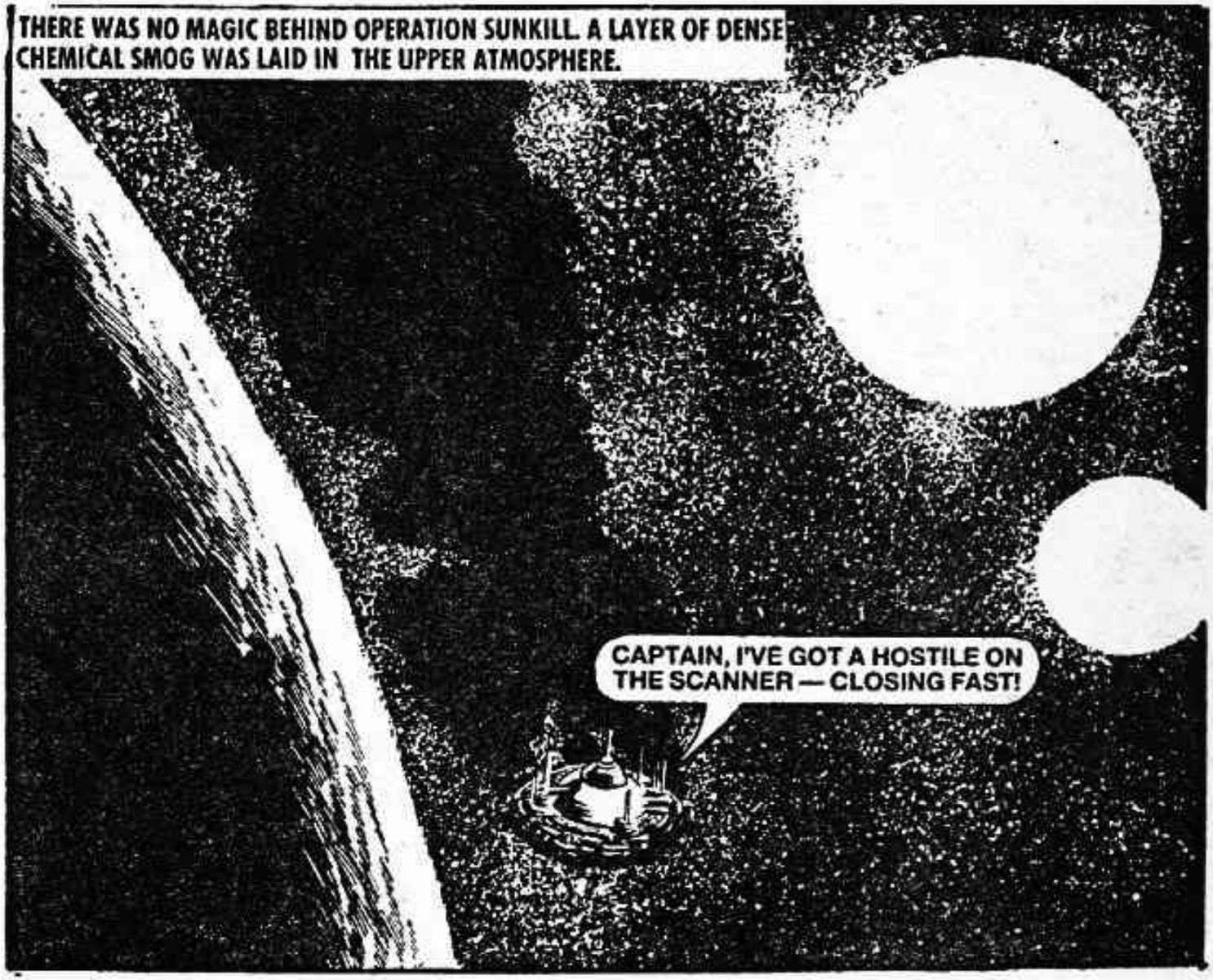
A WELL-LAID ARTILLERY SHOT SHATTERED THE CRAG WHERE THE EARTHMEN WERE STANDING . . .
. . . BUT THE INSTANT BEFORE THE SHOT STRUCK . . .
. . . THEY TELEPORTED TO THE CRAG ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE PASS.
BEHIND YOU, EMPEROR!
THIS SORCERY WILL UNSETTLE MY ARMY!

YOU, MAGUS . . . SHOW MY MEN THAT OUR MAGIC IS SUPREME OR THEY WILL BREAK RANKS AND RUN.
I GAVE YOU A PROMISE AND I WILL DELIVER.
LOOK OUT ABOVE YOU!
W-WHAT IS IT?


SOMEBODY ON THE EMPEROR'S SIDE HAS THE USE OF A MOLECULAR CONDENSOR RAY.
THE MOLECULAR CONDENSOR CAUSED LOCAL ATMOSPHERIC CHANGES, AND RAIN BEGAN TO POUR DOWN . . .
WE'RE TRAPPED! THE TELEPORT ISN'T SAFE TO USE WHEN IT'S WET.
I THINK IT IS TIME FOR YOUR MASTER STROKE.
HOLMES TO RELIEF SHIP: START OPERATION SUNKILL.

YOU BEGIN TO ANNOY ME! I SHALL BLOT OUT THE LIGHT.

AN ECLIPSE, THE MOST BALEFUL OF IMAGES, PUT FROZEN FEAR INTO THE HEARTS OF THE EMPEROR'S ARMY.
IT'S THE LORD OF DARKNESS HIMSELF UP ON THAT CRAG.
STAND FIRM SOLDIER, OUR OFFICERS WILL SHOOT YOU IF YOU RUN.


THERE WAS NO MAGIC BEHIND OPERATION SUNKILL. A LAYER OF DENSE CHEMICAL SMOG WAS LAID IN THE UPPER ATMOSPHERE.
CAPTAIN, I'VE GOT A HOSTILE ON THE SCANNER — CLOSING FAST!

EVADE . . . EVADE! RELIEF SHIP TO HOLMES: SORRY WE HAVE TO ABANDON OPERATION SUNKILL.
NONE OF THE TERRANS COULD WORK OUT WHAT WAS GOING ON.
THEY'RE UNDER ATTACK? BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!
THERE IS A SCIENCE EQUAL TO OURS BEING USED AGAINST US, AND I'VE LOCATED THE SOURCE.

HOLMES HAD DETECTED ELECTRONIC EMISSIONS COMING FROM THE SINISTER COVERED CART OF THE EMPEROR'S ADVISOR.
WELL DONE,MAGICIAN! THAT'S SHOWN THEM WE HAVE MAGIC AS WELL AS THEM!

KNIGHTON TOOK ACTION—
THAT ADVISOR MUST BE ALIEN . . . I'VE GOT TO STOP HIM USING HIS SCIENCE TO SEIZE THE KEY.
THE TELEPORT LINK WAS NOW DRY ENOUGH TO FUNCTION.

KNIGHTON WAS BEAMED INTO THE CAGE—
THE LOAD IS PROTECTED BY A FORCE FIELD, BUT THE CART ISN'T.
LUCKY FOR US THE CAGE IS ALONGSIDE THE ADVISOR'S CART.

THE CART COLLAPSED REVEALING A NEUTRON GENERATOR—
AS THE MAGUS STUMBLED CLEAR—
CURSE THE TERRAN . . . HE HAS EXPOSED ME.
CALM THOSE BEASTS DOWN, MEN, WHILE I GET MY ADVISOR TO SAFETY.

W-WHAT ART THOU?
I AM THE MAGUS OF ARTEKON . . . SWORN TO TAKE POSSESSION OF THE UNIVERSAL KEY.
I HAVE BEEN IN GRIP OF AN EVIL SORCERER! DESTROY HIM BEFORE HE ENSLAVES MY MIND AGAIN.

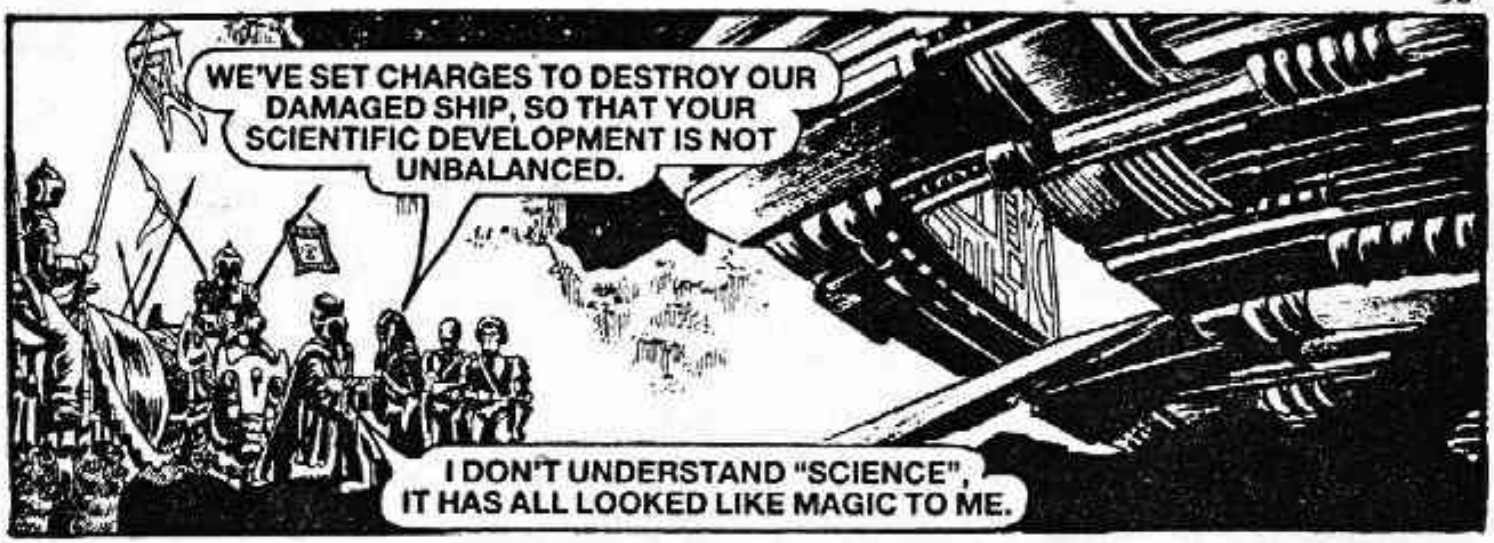
FOOLS! I COULD HAVE GIVEN YOU GREAT POWERS IN RETURN FOR OBEDIENCE. MY POWERS ARE PROOF AGAINST YOUR PUNY WEAPONS.

YOU WILL PAY FOR THIS!

AN INVISIBLE FORCE LIFTED THE ALIEN MODULE TOWARDS A WAITING ORBITER COMMMAND SHIP.

DOES THIS MEAN AN END TO FIGHTING?
I HOPE SO!

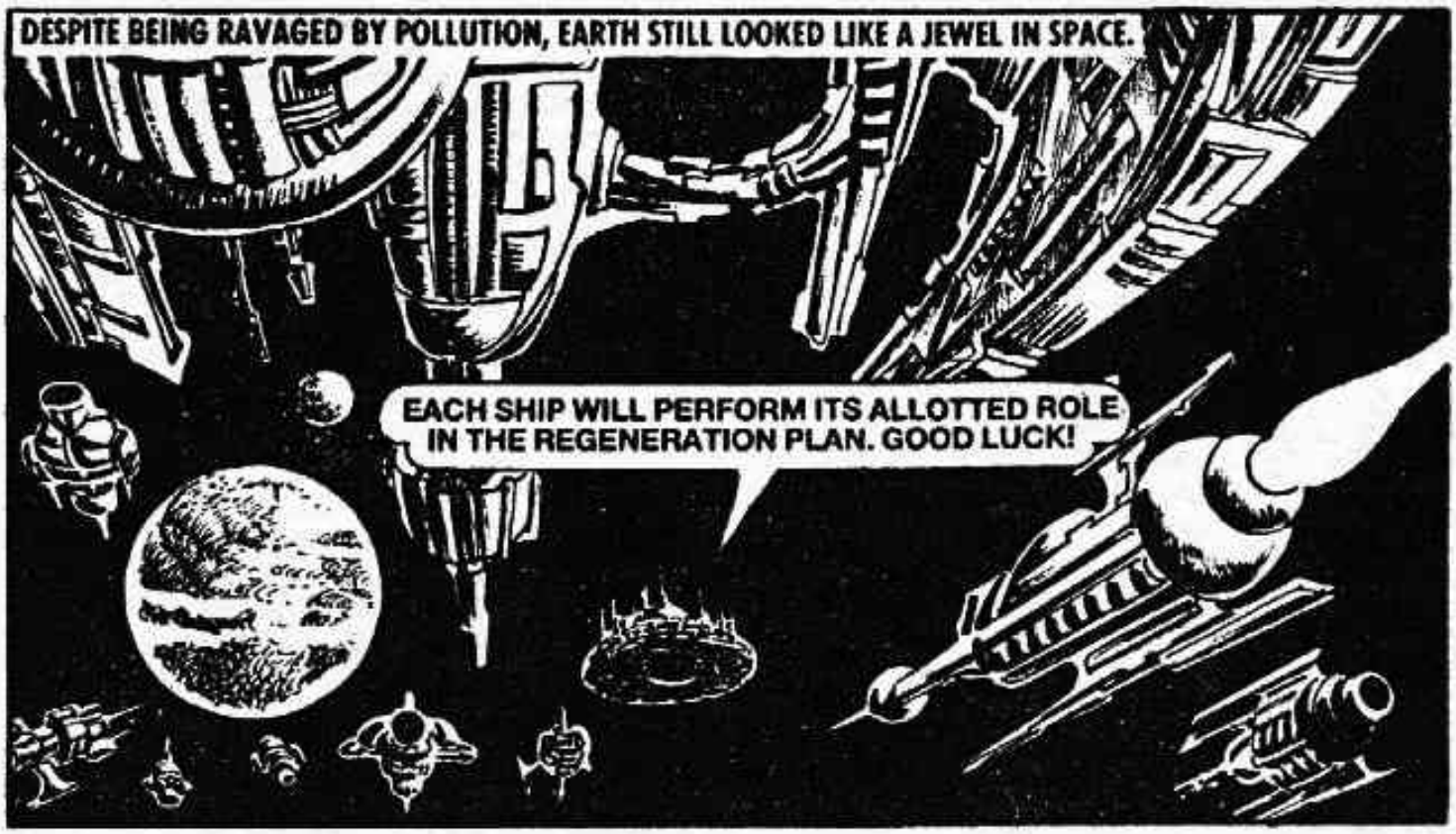
THE PRISON WAGON HAD BEEN OVERTURNED IN THE BLAST OF THE TAKE OFF.
THE TELEPORT TERMINAL IS OUT OF REACH, I'M TRAPPED.
DEATH TO ALL MAGICIANS!
NO! THE TERRANS NEVER TRIED TO USE OR HARM US! THEY WERE OUR FRIENDS BEFORE THE SORCERER TURNED ME AGAINST THEM.
I SHALL RELEASE ALL TERRAN PRISONERS AND WE WILL BE FRIENDS AGAIN.
I THINK YOU'LL FIND THAT YOUR DUNGEONS ARE ALREADY EMPTY.
THE EMPEROR WAS ANXIOUS TO MAKE REPARATIONS FOR THE HARM HE HAD DONE WHILE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE ALIEN ADVISOR. HE OFFERED TO REBUILD THE SHATTERED FORTRESS, BUT THE TERRANS HAD TO LEAVE. THEY HAD AN URGENT TASK AHEAD — TO CARRY THE UNIVERSAL KEY TO THE EARTH.


WE'VE SET CHARGES TO DESTROY OUR DAMAGED SHIP, SO THAT YOUR SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENT IS NOT UNBALANCED.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND "SCIENCE", IT HAS ALL LOOKED LIKE MAGIC TO ME.

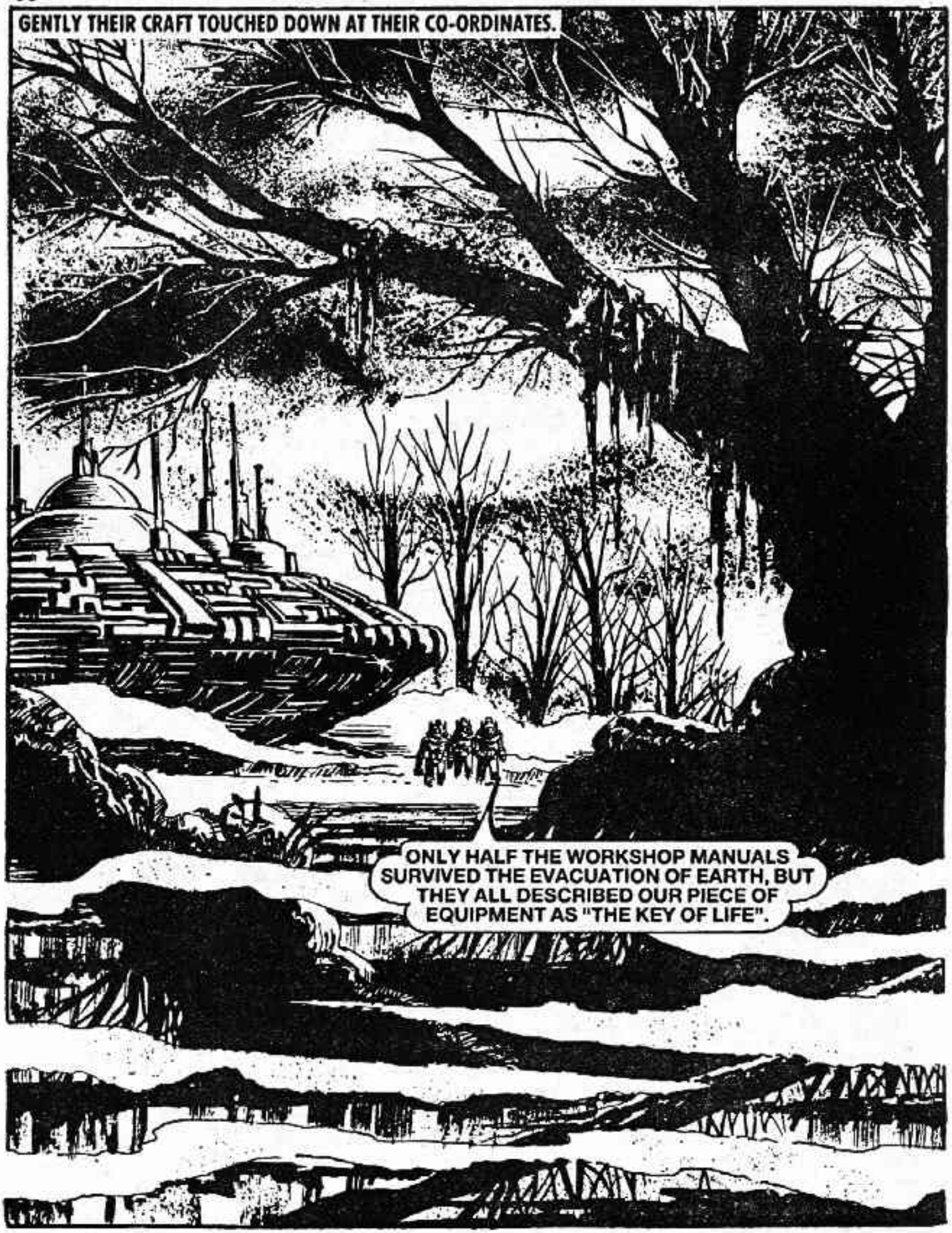
THE TERRAN CRAFT LIFTED OFF —
I HAVE TO REPAIR THE DAMAGE DONE TO MY WORLD BY THE INFLUENCE OF THE ADVISOR, BUT THE TERRANS SAY THEY ARE GOING TO REBUILD A WHOLE WORLD OUT OF CHAOS. IT IS MAGIC INDEED.

FROM ALL PARTS OF THE GALAXY, THE SCATTERED DESCENDANTS OF THE ORIGINAL REFUGEES FROM OLD EARTH BROUGHT THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE REGENERATION OPERATION —
I NEVER KNEW SO MANY SPACE SHIPS EXISTED!
THIS IS ONLY THE ADVANCE PARTY.
I WISH I COULD BELIEVE WE'VE SEEN THE LAST OF THAT ALIEN.
THE KEY IS SAFE FROM HIM WITH THIS FLEET TO GUARD IT.

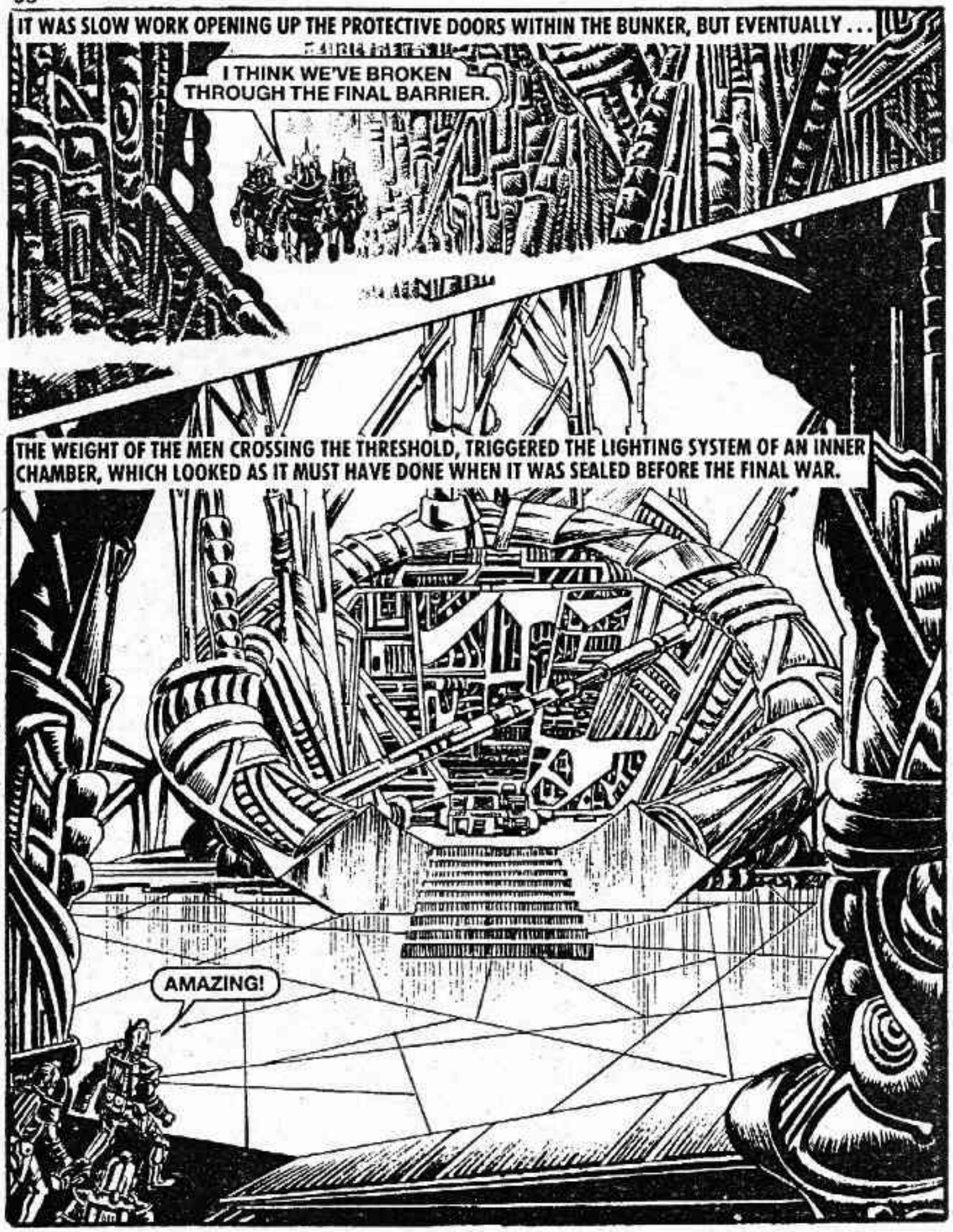
EVENTUALLY THE FINAL PREPARATIONS WERE COMPLETED AND THE EXPEDITION RECEIVED THE ORDER TO MOVE OUT.
NEXT STOP THE SOLAR SYSTEM!
MANY MONTHS OF INTERSTELLAR HYPER-FLIGHT LAY AHEAD OF THE ADVANCE PARTY.

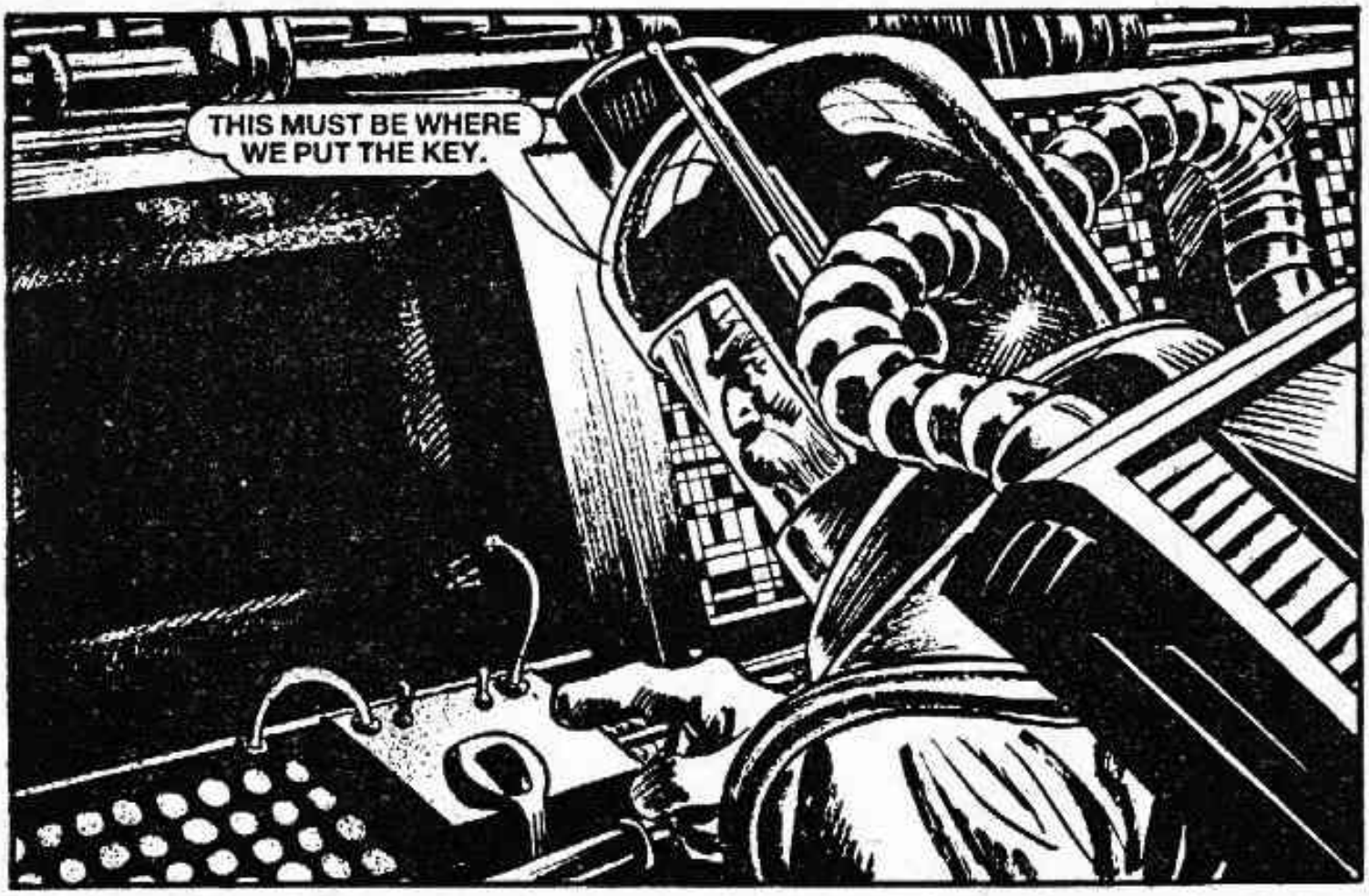

DESPITE BEING RAVAGED BY POLLUTION, EARTH STILL LOOKED LIKE A JEWEL IN SPACE.
EACH SHIP WILL PERFORM ITS ALLOTTED ROLE IN THE REGENERATION PLAN. GOOD LUCK!

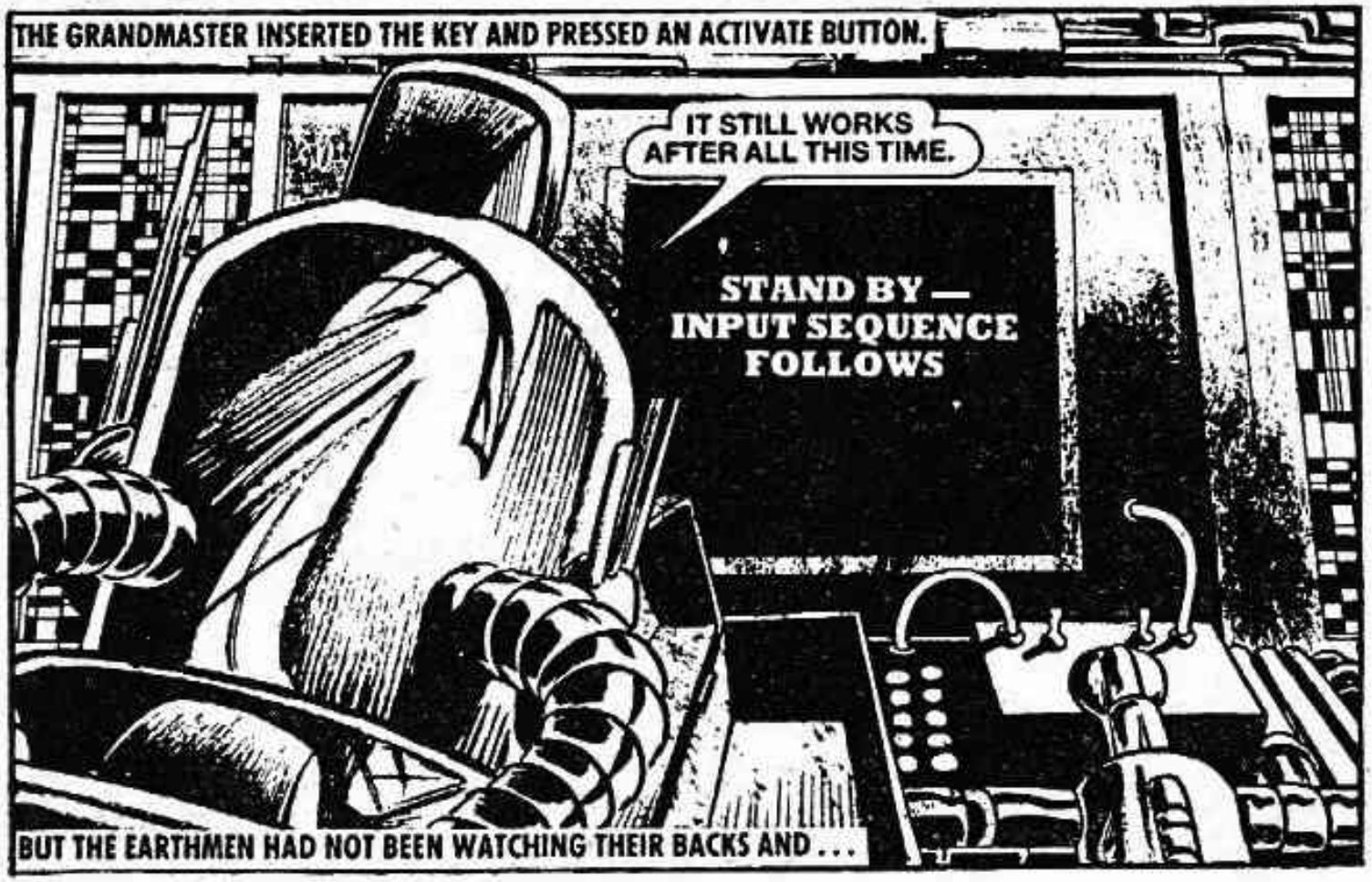
THE GRANDMASTER, KNIGHTON AND HOLMES HAD THE TASK OF ACTIVATING THE UNIVERSAL KEY.
WHAT EXACTLY WILL THE KEY DO?
WE DO NOT KNOW.


GENTLY THEIR CRAFT TOUCHED DOWN AT THEIR CO-ORDINATES.
ONLY HALF THE WORKSHOP MANUALS SURVIVED THE EVACUATION OF EARTH, BUT THEY ALL DESCRIBED OUR PIECE OF EQUIPMENT AS "THE KEY OF LIFE".

THE ANCIENT MANUALS FORTUNATELY TELL US THE EXACT LOCATION WHERE THE KEY IS TO BE USED.
THEY REACHED THE ENTRANCE TO AN UNDERGROUND SHELTER —
THE LOCATION INSTRUCTIONS ARE SPOT ON, BUT THE LOCK HAS BEEN CORRODED BY YEARS OF EXPOSURE TO THIS POISONOUS FOG.


IT WAS SLOW WORK OPENING UP THE PROTECTIVE DOORS WITHIN THE BUNKER, BUT EVENTUALLY . . .
I THINK WE'VE BROKEN THROUGH THE FINAL BARRIER.
THE WEIGHT OF THE MEN CROSSING THE THRESHOLD, TRIGGERED THE LIGHTING SYSTEM OF AN INNER CHAMBER, WHICH LOOKED AS IT MUST HAVE DONE WHEN IT WAS SEALED BEFORE THE FINAL WAR.
AMAZING!


THIS MUST BE WHERE WE PUT THE KEY.


THE GRANDMASTER INSERTED THE KEY AND PRESSED AN ACTIVATE BUTTON.
IT STILL WORKS AFTER ALL THIS TIME.
STAND BY — INPUT SEQUENCE FOLLOWS
BUT THE EARTHMEN HAD NOT BEEN WATCHING THEIR BACKS AND . . .

. . . THE EVIL ALIEN MAGUS CAUGHT THEM UNWARES.
DO NOT SHOOT! THE EQUIPMENT MIGHT GET DAMAGED.
IT WAS HARD TO FOLLOW YOU AND REMAIN UNDETECTED, BUT I SUCCEEDED AND IMMORTALITY WILL BE MY REWARD.
START CODE INPUT - 353.00996
ONCE I AM IMMORTAL, MY ENEMIES WILL DIE.

HE BELIEVES THE KEY WILL MAKE HIM IMMORTAL!
IT WILL BRING ETERNAL LIFE . . . BUT NOT FOR HIM.

A VIDSCREEN BLINKED ON —
HIS DESIRE FOR PERSONAL IMMORTALITY BLINDED HIM TO THE REAL MEANING OF THE IMMORTAL KEY!

ARE THESE PICTURES OF WHAT IS NOW HAPPENING OUTSIDE?
IF THE TEACHINGS OF OLD EARTH ARE CORRECT — YES!

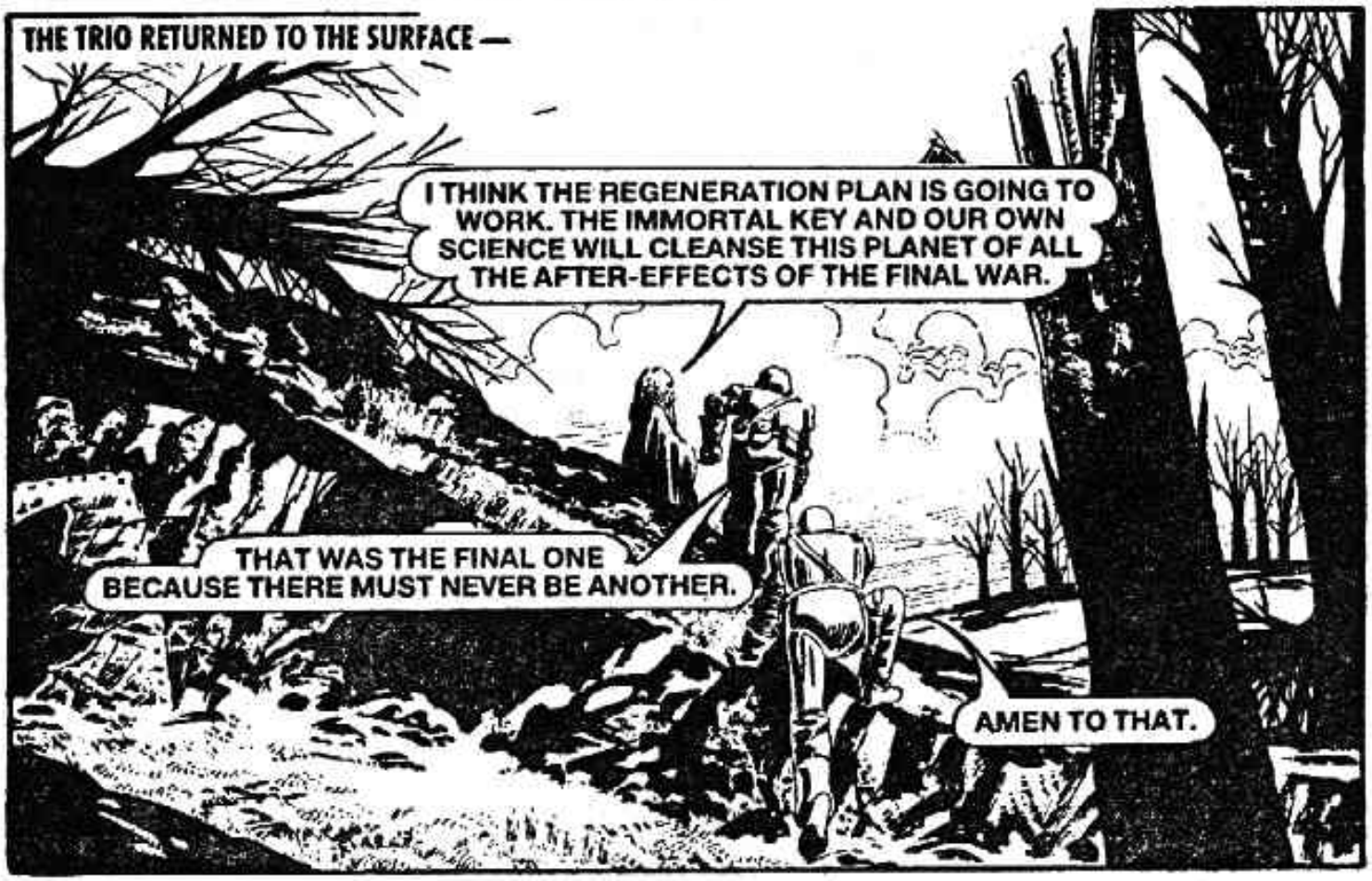
WHAT IS HAPPENING? I HAVE COMPLETED THE INPUT SEQUENCE BUT I REMAIN UNCHANGED.

THE SCIENTISTS OF OLD EARTH BUILT THIS SYSTEM TO PURIFY THE PLANET IN THE AFTERMATH OF AN ATOMIC WAR, TO ENSURE THAT MANKIND COULD ONE DAY RE-INHABIT A NEW EARTH.
THE KEY WAS THE KEY TO THE IMMORTALITY OF THE PLANET EARTH. WATER AND SEED RELEASED TO RECULTIVATE A NEW PURIFIED SOIL.
IF I CANNOT BENEFIT FROM THE KEY THEN NOBODY ELSE WILL!
NOW,KNIGHTON!

THAT'S THE FIRST TIME I EVER SHOT SOMEONE IN THE BACK, BUT THAT THING DESERVED IT!
I HAVE BEEN CHEATED OF IMMORTAL LIFE, BUT YOU CANNOT DENY ME YOUR ETERNAL DEATHS.

BUT THE WEAKENED MAGUS OF ARTEKON COULDN'T WITHSTAND THE POWER OF HIS OWN NEUTRON ROD, AND BEFORE HE COULD KILL ANYBODY —
AIEEEEEE!

HE'S VAPOURISED HIMSELF! LIKE ALL GOOD MAGICIANS HE SAVED HIS BEST TRICK UNTIL LAST. NOW YOU SEE HIM,NOW YOU DON'T!


THE TRIO RETURNED TO THE SURFACE —
I THINK THE REGENERATION PLAN IS GOING TO WORK. THE IMMORTAL KEY AND OUR OWN SCIENCE WILL CLEANSE THIS PLANET OF ALL THE AFTER-EFFECTS OF THE FINAL WAR.
THAT WAS THE FINAL ONE BECAUSE THERE MUST NEVER BE ANOTHER.
AMEN TO THAT.

Printed and Published in Great Britain by D. C. THOMSON & CO., LTD.,
185 Fleet Street, London EC4A 2HS.
© D. C. THOMSON & CO., LTD., 1986.

We at "Starblazer" want to bring you the very best in Fantasy Fiction. To do that we need *your* help.

So that we can produce the kind of stories you want to read, please fill in the questionnaire on this page and send it to "Starblazer", D. C. Thomson & Co. Ltd., 185 Fleet Street, London EC4A 2HS.

If you don't want to cut your issue of "Starblazer", you can copy the questionnaire onto a sheet of paper.

And there's a chance to win a full-colour print of one of our new-style wraparound covers!

The senders of the ten letters which we judge to be the most informative will each receive one of the prints. We want to hear from you NOW!

Name ..... **Age** .....

Address .....

What kind of science fiction do you most enjoy? Please tick appropriate boxes. If you dislike any type of story, place a cross in the box.

SUPERHEROES	☐	☐	**FANTASY**
DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS	☐	☐	**SWORD AND SORCERY**
POST HOLOCAUST	☐	☐	**HORROR**
ADVENTURE	☐	☐	**STAR WARS**
HUMOUR	☐	☐	**DR. WHO**
			MYSTERY

Where do you normally buy your STARBLAZER? _____

_____

Which is your favourite STARBLAZER story? _____

_____

Which is your favourite character? _____

Which is your favourite science fiction movie? _____

_____

Have you any comments to make about STARBLAZER. . . good or bad? _____

_____

THE SECRET WAR

When Earth was ravaged by the Thermowars, the inhabitants left to seek refuge on primitive planets. Earth's technology had to be kept secret, because in the wrong hands, it could destroy the Universe. But Warlords fought to acquire the secret of the technology and they stopped at nothing.

w.starblazer.co.nr
use only. Do not distribute)